

About This Document

The goal of the Project Prioritization Process is the establishment of an objective, quantitative-based method for evaluating and comparing proposed transportation projects. Ultimately, through an approach which can be applied across the Albuquerque Metropolitan Planning Area, the project prioritization process highlights projects which reflect and incorporate regional priorities.

This guidebook is an introduction to MRCOG's Project Prioritization Process (PPP) and an attempt to explain its purpose and components. By providing an explanation of the elements included in the PPP, the reasons for their selection, how the components and criteria fit together in a comprehensive process, and the scoring methodology for each performance measure, the document explains how regional needs are measured and how member agencies and project developers can craft projects which address regional needs.

The PPP is to be used primarily in the development of the short-range Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP), although it may also prove useful in the development of the long-range metropolitan transportation plan. The TIP is the means for allocating federal funding to specific transportation projects. The selection process is competitive and the demand for funding is generally far greater than the supply. Within this context, the project prioritization process will guide the development of the TIP and lead to allocation of federal dollars in the most productive and meaningful method possible.

The PPP and its components are made available to the public and member agencies through the guidebook. It is our hope that the evaluation criteria presented here form a consequential role in the planning process, and may even prove useful for member agencies in the development of their own capital improvement projects.

Introduction

The Project Prioritization Process (PPP) was first utilized in 2010 as a tool in the development of the 2012-2017 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The TIP is the short-range funding mechanism that programs funding, particularly federal funding, for transportation projects. All projects within the Albuquerque Metropolitan Planning Area (AMPA) receiving federal highway or transit funding must be in the TIP.

Every two years a “new TIP” is developed by adding the next two fiscal years. Federal resources are limited and should be distributed based on a clear set of short-term transportation priorities. The allocation of those funds is developed by staff of the Mid-Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MRMPO) and the Transportation Program Technical Group (TPTG) before receiving final approval from the Metropolitan Transportation Board, a body of elected officials from across the region. A project must be included in the long-range transportation plan for the region – the most recent version for the AMPA is the 2035 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) – for it to be considered for inclusion in the short-range TIP. MRMPO uses the Project Prioritization Process (PPP) as a tool for project selection. At its core, the Project Prioritization Process distills the goals and objectives of the most recent MTP into something which can be measured. This allows projects proposed for inclusion in the TIP to be evaluated based on the extent to which they address regional needs and to be compared and contrasted against each other.

The need for a PPP begins with the desire for a more data-driven approach to project selection and transportation decision-making. In addition, a PPP is increasingly relevant for the AMPA region given the dynamic growth and development expected to occur in the area. Demographic projections from

the University of New Mexico Bureau of Business and Economic Research indicate growth of more than 660,000 new residents in the four-county area (Bernalillo, Sandoval, Tarrant, and Valencia Counties) between 2008 and 2035. What is more, MRMPO land use forecasts indicate that by 2035 approximately half of the AMPA population will reside west of the Rio Grande. One result of such a pattern is that the AMPA would need to double its river-crossing capacity to attain system performance in 2035 that matches 2008 levels. These projections clearly demonstrate the need for a process that prioritizes projects that lead to the long-term sustainability and continued functionality of the transportation network.

The PPP more specifically emerged from the Congestion Management Process (CMP) Committee’s desire to see federal transportation dollars allocated to corridors in the AMPA which experience the most congestion and poorest transportation conditions.¹ Feedback from various committees indicated the PPP needed to evolve beyond the evaluation system previously employed by the MRMPO, which asked member agencies to subjectively assess whether proposed projects met the seven goals of the 2030 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP). To do so required a meaningful and objective methodology that could incorporate all facets of the transportation planning process and comprehensively evaluate the benefits individual projects would provide to the AMPA.

Development of the PPP

The development of the PPP began by reviewing practices of other Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) to assess methods and criteria for evaluating and

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¹ The Congestion Management Process is a federally-mandated program to analyze the sources and extent of congestion in a metropolitan planning area over time. A CMP may also provide recommendations for projects to be included in the TIP. The CMP Committee is comprised of technical experts from MRMPO member agencies.